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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SURREAL SUMMIT ON INFRASTRUCTURE IN AKWA
IBOM STATE

REF: LAGOS 208

11. (SBU) Summary: In an "Infrastructure Summit" held September 18 and 19 the government of Akwa Ibom State laid out its development strategy and attempted to interest the private sector in public private partnerships for infrastructure development in the state. Representatives of Akwa Ibom's civil society lamented the emphasis on flashy projects pointing out the near absolute lack of primary education, primary health care and water treatment in the State, and Poloffs experienced the bad roads and unreliable electric power even at the 5-star Le Meridian resort, where the summit was staged. The contrast between the government's extravagant plans and the actual level of development in the state, coupled with the state government's lack of progress on passing fiscal responsibility and government procurement legislation, made the entire summit seem surreal. End Summary.

2 (SBU) Poloffs attended the Akwa Ibom "Infrastructure Summit" held September 18 and 19 at Le Meridian resort outside of Uyo. The development plans of Akwa Ibom state as outlined in Governor Godswill Akpabio's opening remarks and subsequent papers are very ambitious. Akpabio promised to bring an electric power plant on line this year with a capacity of 191 MW. He promised to construct or reconstruct 230 kilometers of road. He expressed the intention to develop Ibaka into a deep water port for both naval and commercial purposes. He stated that the airport currently under construction will be completed in 2009 and will meet international standards for receiving wide-bodied jets for both passenger and cargo operations. (Note: The airport project was initially contracted to DynCorp, a U.S. company. After a lengthy dispute over USD 12 million in arrears, DynCorp terminated the contract with Akwa Ibom State. End Note.) He reported proudly that a dialysis clinic was now operating in the state. He announced plans for the construction of a Science and Technology Park to foster high-tech industries, particularly communications companies, in the state. He outlined plans for a convention center/stadium capable of seating 10,000 people, which he claimed would attract the ruling People's Democratic Party's Convention in 2011. Last but not least, Akpabio described plans for an entertainment center to include a five-star hotel, shopping center and theme park to attract tourists to

the state. (Note: The conference took place at the 5-star Le Meridian hotel, a plush resort and golf course constructed with state money by the former governor, Victor Attah. End note.)

13. (SBU) Members of the audience drew a very different picture of the state of development in Akwa Ibom State during discussions following presentations and in private discussions with Poloffs. One participant lamented the focus on five-star hotels and conference centers when the primary schools in her Local Government Area did not have chairs much less books for the pupils. A doctor pointed out that because there is no ambulance service patients needing emergency care were often brought to hospitals on motorbikes, clinging to the driver while a relative or friend rode behind to keep the patient from falling off. A nurse described patients lying on concrete floors for lack of sufficient beds. The managing director of the Akwa Ibom Water Company admitted that 40% of the state's population does not have access to potable water.

The lack of security in the state was highlighted by several participants, who challenged the repeated assertions of government representatives that Akwa Ibom was a "peaceful" state.

14. (SBU) Comment: The political speeches, particularly those praising the governor, were long and fulsome, but Poloffs personally experienced the deplorable state of the roads and the unreliable power as well as heard from reliable sources about the inadequacies in fundamental health care, primary education, and water treatment. The state government consistently tried to disassociate itself from its

LAGOS 00000399 002 OF 002

predecessor's administration, despite the fact that both governors are from the ruling PDP party, and notwithstanding Akpabio's reported connections with Vice President Goodluck Jonathan. Predictably, there was no mention of the problems that plagued the U.S. company Dyncorp's airport project outside Uyo, the state capital (Lagos 208). To date, Akwa Ibom has not yet taken steps to adopt fiscal responsibility and government procurement legislation. As a result, we fear that many of the infrastructure projects touted at the conference will become, as have all too many throughout Nigeria, "bridges to nowhere." End Comment.

15. This cable was cleared by Abuja.
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